

Investiture Speech

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Thank you. Dr. Moffett, Mr. Sibille and other members of the University Of Louisiana System Board Of Supervisors for your support and confidence in my ability to serve as this university's eighth president. I have prepared for this responsibility for many years and I eagerly accept it.

There are many people here today to whom I wish to express my gratitude. It is their encouragement, advice and wisdom over the years that have sustained me in darker hours and elevated me during the brighter ones, such as today.

First, a deep debt of gratitude goes to Linda, my wife, who has been with me over the last nineteen years and has allowed me to pursue my career and personal goals, even when the work hours were long and required us to move seven times. During this time she raised our children and

taught those values and laid the moral foundation that will guide them successfully throughout their lives.

Next, there is my family who challenged me throughout the years, and encouraged me to do what had never been accomplished on either paternal or maternal sides – get a college education and earn a degree. Several cousins have joined us today to help me celebrate this day. My parents are not seated in the audience today, but they are in my heart, which is filled with gratitude for what they gave me.

In the audience is one friend who I have known for over 55 years. She and I began kindergarten together and, other than my older cousins, is the one person here today who has known me the longest. I am humbled to have her here.

Thank you to the many friends whom I have made over the years and who have travelled near and far to be with me here today. There are individuals here who have travelled from Texas, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky and, of course, Louisiana to spend time and celebrate this occasion with

me. Most of these friends I became associated with through higher education. All of them have contributed to my personal and professional growth.

Last but not least, thanks to the faculty, staff, students and people of this region who have welcomed me and my family with warmth to the region and university.

In the early discussions related to my Investiture, one challenge was issued. That challenge was to highlight the excellence of the University of Louisiana at Monroe. We decided that this week should shine a spotlight on the accomplishments of our faculty, staff and students, the achievements of our alums, and the inseparable bond between ULM this region and the state.

The Investiture Committee issued the call to our students, faculty and alums to plan a week of activities that would achieve that goal. I am proud to say they met the challenge. Thank you on a job well done!

This week, we heard great stories from our alumni as they shared how ULM through its faculty provided the foundation that allowed them to move on to the personal and professional successes they now enjoy.

This includes the story of a young man from Marion, Louisiana, who along with his five siblings, was raised by his father following his mother's death. He talked this week of the focus he had and the encouragement he received at ULM - he is now a Vice President for CenturyLink, the third largest communications company in America.

And then there was the story of a young woman from Mer Rouge, who at the age of 19 had her first child, and by 21, had divorced and began her college career while working in a bank full-time. She earned her education degree and then a master's in history at ULM before completing law school. She is the subject of an HBO documentary as an attorney fighting for families impacted by hazardous waste.

There is the story of a young man from Sterlington who earned his GED and, by his own admission, started out as a weak student at ULM. He shared how he benefitted from some of his mentors here, went on to graduate from medical school and founded one of Louisiana's largest health networks.

There is the story a young woman from Sicily Island who, because of the connections she made with the faculty here, got on an airplane for the first time for an overseas internship in London. While there, she successfully completed an internship that led to the success she enjoys today working for a major insurance provider.

And lastly, there is the story of young TV reporter turned biographer who has captured the interest of many with his book on former governor Edwin Edwards.

I could list success after success over ULM's remarkable history. I have chosen these as just a sample of what the

faculty and staff of this institution has contributed to this region, state, nationally and internationally over the years.

Over 80 years ago, representatives from Lions Club, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club and Chamber of Commerce worked to pass legislation to establish the beginnings of this great university, Ouachita Junior College. That commitment to higher education, by not only the citizens of the twin cities, but also the entire region, is a tradition that I am proud to be affiliated. It is important to celebrate and remember our past; however, we must now direct our energy to the future.

I would like to share the direction we will take to assure our continued success. We have been challenged to do more with less. The fact is ULM has done more with less for many years! In fact, Dr. George T. Walker in his book, *The Building of a University*, had a section dedicated to that topic-it is not a new concept at ULM! Over the years the resolve and commitment by the faculty and staff, despite many challenges, have

continued to educate our students such as those I referenced earlier.

We must build the most efficient organization possible. We must use every available resource to recruit and retain the very best students, faculty and staff. The recent administrative reorganization is the first step. The vice presidents and I in consultation with faculty and staff will continue to review methods and processes and commit any savings to our academic core.

We will raise our admission standards so as to recruit those students who have the greatest probability of succeeding at ULM. We shall become more aggressive in our recruiting efforts so as to not only increase the pool of qualified students, but to increase the success of our student population. My predecessors' charge was to welcome students regardless of their academic preparation through open admissions. Had this university been charged with the same expectations as we are now, I dare say the stories of

success I outlined earlier would not have occurred. Those individuals may not have been admitted to this university. Our success will now be judged on our ability to retain and graduate students at a progressively higher rate. We will meet that challenge.

We will improve our internal operations. We must institutionalize a culture of promptness, civility, courtesy and respect as we respond to the needs of our internal and external constituents. ULM has a fine reputation for warmth and kindness, we will build on that sound foundation.

We will build upon the relevant research that has been and is being conducted at ULM, but in some cases has not been recognized outside of the departments in which the research was conducted. Cancer research, Alzheimer's disease, family therapy, archeology, environmental studies and many others provide

opportunities to not only advance this university, but also helps build the economic strength of this region.

We will expand our partnerships with other higher education institutions businesses, health sciences, education, governmental agencies, civic organizations and the agri-business industry to build a better, stronger Northeast Louisiana. Since arriving I have seen and discussed the potential for this region. Targeting higher education offerings that meet the demands of the region's businesses including agri-busines, education, technology and the arts and sciences will not only retain regionally located industries, but also assist in the recruitment of new businesses to the area. We shall not lose our focus on this effort we shall be a willing partner.

We will continue to work diligently with our legislators and other public officials in their support of ULM and higher education in this region. We will be active in

communicating the needs of this institution and how addressing those needs, benefit the entire region. We serve one of the poorest areas of the country. Education is the best routes in reducing poverty. We must continue to be aggressive as a university to lead those efforts in reducing poverty and allowing every child the opportunity to attain a better way of life. This can only be accomplished; however, if this institution is adequately funded.

I often hear about the beauty of this campus, and I agree about how pretty the bayou is and how wonderful the new buildings and other infrastructure are that surround it.

But the true beauty of this place is not always seen. The buildings and bayou represent ULM's external beauty – but its heart and soul is found in its people. It is found in the staff member who cuts grass in 100-degree heat; it is found in the person who re-shelves library books

night after night; it is present in the faculty member who provides one-on-one mentoring and advice to our students; it is evident in that member of the campus family who makes a student feel as if they are home.

Just two days ago we dedicated and renamed the former Administration Building in honor of George T. Walker, the longest serving president in our school's history. I want to conclude this afternoon by borrowing from his challenge to do more with less. Dr. Walker said, and I quote:

“The strategy (for growth) was based on the belief that people, more than money and physical facilities, make the difference in the building of an institution recognized for its quality.”

There are many special people who brought me to where I am today and it took many special people to bring ULM to the place it is today.

It will take all of you, the heart and soul of this institution and this region, to carry ULM forward to its next level of greatness. I hope to play some small part in that greatness.

I thank you and commend you for all that you have done to make this place and this moment so special.

Thank you!